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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MONROVIA 001293

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: REHABILITATING A TROUBLED BUT PROPITIOUS MARITIME  
SECTOR

REFS: (A) MONROVIA 1070  
(B) MONROVIA 1007  
(C) MONROVIA 846  
(D) MONROVIA 708  
(E) MONROVIA 627  
(F) MONROVIA 610

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Liberian maritime sector has a unique and vibrant past, but years of war and neglect have taken a toll on the fishing industry (ref A), the port (ref B), and overall maritime control and security inside Liberia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Although Liberia's U.S.-based ship registry (LISCR) is still the world's second largest and a notable contributor to the government's budget, Liberian employment in the maritime industry is negligible and the country's maritime academy moribund. Security at the Port of Monrovia falls short of International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) compliance and the country does not have a coast guard or any other marine security assets. The Government of Liberia (GOL) is seeking to address these and other shortfalls in maritime governance and security with a variety of efforts: a conference on and draft legislation regarding international search and rescue; proposals for the re-establishment of a Maritime Training Institute; requests for coast guard and other marine security and surveillance assistance; and consideration of a plan to privatize part or all of the Monrovia Freeport, including port security. Strong political will for reform suggests abundant potential for leveraging upcoming USG technical assistance. END SUMMARY.

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LIBERIA TO BECOME REGIONAL  
MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE HUB  
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¶2. (U) Liberia hosted a regional Maritime Search and Rescue conference in Monrovia in collaboration with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) from September 25-27, 2007. Liberia was recently selected by the IMO to serve as the Regional Coordinating Center for Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) in the West Africa Region. The Monrovia conference was attended by representatives from the IMO West Africa Zone: Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

¶3. (U) In connection with the conference, President Johnson Sirleaf forwarded two bills to the Liberia National Legislature for the

creation of a Maritime Search and Rescue Center, and for ratification of the International Search and Rescue Convention of 1979, which came into effect in 1985. Both bills were passed by the Legislature and forwarded to the President for her signature and passage into law. Bureau of Maritime Affairs (BMA) Deputy Commissioner Yvonne Clinton told Econoff October 18 that an IMO consultant is scheduled to arrive in November to help identify a site for the SAR headquarters. IMO will provide some initial (unspecified) equipment and training but the overall headquarters will be financed by the GOL.

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MARITIME SECURITY - UPCOMING VISIT TO ENHANCE AIS  
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14. (SBU) Liberia currently has access to a basic Automatic Identification System (AIS) set up in collaboration with Lloyd's of London and the United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) to track ships in West Africa. Liberia provided the sites and electricity, Lloyd's provided the equipment, and UNMIL helped install two antennae, in addition to access terminals at the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and BMA. A team from the U.S. Navy is expected to arrive in Liberia on October 31 to conduct site surveys for the installation of additional AIS equipment. At present, the BMA uses AIS data to monitor cargo ships coming to and from the port of Monrovia. The GOL also established a Surveillance Task Force consisting of representatives from the Bureau of National Fisheries, the BMA, the MOD, the Ministry of Finance, the National Port Authority and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

15. (SBU) Liberia does not have a navy and securing the country's coastal waters is in theory the duty of the demobilized Liberian Coast Guard. Without a functioning coast guard, Liberia is unable

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to intercept unauthorized or suspicious vessels and there are often reports of rogue fishing vessels from China and other African countries (and perhaps Europe and other Asian countries) illegally traversing the country's coastal waters. In June, a large ship was stolen from the port of Monrovia (refs E and F) and Liberian authorities could do nothing but watch the ship flee on the AIS monitors. The Marine Surveillance Task Force intends to procure a patrol vessel that will be used in conjunction with the AIS. (Note: AIS only tracks ships over 300 tons that are required by the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) to have AIS transponders. Fishing boats are not required by the International Maritime Organization to have transponders and thus AIS will not necessarily help detect illegal fishing unless local laws are enacted to require AIS in smaller vessels. End note).

16. (U) The Ministry of Agriculture recently completed a National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy that encourages community participation in maritime security and natural resource management. The GOL is proposing a co-management regime in fisheries surveillance between the government and fishermen that will provide legal support to ensure all restrictions on artisanal fishing grounds are observed at the community level. In addition, fishermen will be encouraged to participate in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) activities and will be equipped with portable radars and radios to report to an inter-agency MCS coordinating unit any illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing including poaching, transshipment at sea and encroachments in unauthorized fishing zones by industrial vessels.

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THE ONCE AND FUTURE LIBERIAN COAST GUARD  
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17. (U) The Liberian National Coast Guard (LCG) began operations in 1959 after the delivery of two 40-foot patrol boats donated by the United States. By the mid-1980s, the LCG force consisted of six patrol craft (three 50-ton, Swedish-built coastal patrol crafts that were delivered in 1980 as well as three smaller American built patrol craft delivered in 1976) and some 450 officers based at Freeport in Monrovia, as well as at smaller bases in Buchanan, Greenville and Harper. The Coast Guard was once considered the

best-trained and most professional component of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), but war, neglect, and corruption left the coast guard fleet immobilized and effectively defunct. The Liberian Coast Guard folded into the Liberian Navy in 1986, was officially demobilized along with the Armed Forces of Liberia in 2006, and has yet to be reorganized.

18. (U) In 2007, the Ministry of Defense established an inter-Ministerial Task Force to examine the legal groundwork necessary to establish a Coast Guard, and the Ministry of Defense submitted a formal request to the United States for assistance in assessing port and Coast Guard needs. The first step required for the creation of a Coast Guard is the passage of the National Defense Act which authorizes the establishment of a Coast Guard. The MOD is in the process of revising that Act for presentation to the Legislature in January 2008. In addition, in order to be eligible for USG assistance via the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) the coast guard must be established under the Ministry of Defense. ODC participates on the Coast Guard Task Force meetings along with representatives from the BMA, Liberian Seaport Police (LSP), Bureau of Customs and Excise (BCE), and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN).

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PORT SECURITY - ISPS STILL ELUDES MONROVIA FREEPORT  
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19. (SBU) Liberia continues to make slow progress toward implementing the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) code in the Freeport of Monrovia. The National Port Authority (NPA) is an autonomous port authority, rather than a government agency, and is only an "implied" designated authority for the review, approval and verity of Port Facility Security Plans (PFSP). A Joint Security Coordination Committee meets weekly to discuss Freeport security and includes representatives from UNMIL, Customs, NPA, the Liberian Seaport Police (LSP), the Liberian National Police (LNP) and others. Following a spate of thefts in May 2007, the GOL shuffled the

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leadership of the LSP, placing ex-Deputy Director of the Special Security Services (SSS), Ashford Peal, in charge (ref D). Security at the port is currently provided by an unwieldy patchwork of private security guards, LSP, LNP and UNMIL troops - a mixture that led to a shootout at the port between the LNP and LSP in July 2007 (ref C). At present, security forces have only a pair of leased motorized canoes on the water, although the NPA is expecting delivery of a 27-foot Boston Whaler the NPA purchased from the United States to use for security inside the port.

110. (SBU) The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has visited the port of Monrovia on several occasions, most recently for a March 2007 ISPS survey. Although progress has been made in addressing lapses in perimeter security, ID and vehicle control, and security patrols have been increased near the oil jetty, ISPS certification still eludes the NPA. Post has requested further USCG assistance to help Liberia comply with ISPS Code. A follow-up USCG mission is scheduled to arrive in Monrovia in January 2008.

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AFRICA PARTNERSHIP STATION -  
A CHANCE TO FOCUS ON MARITIME ISSUES  
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111. (SBU) Liberia is scheduled to participate in the deployment of the Africa Partnership Station (APS) to West Africa in 2007-08. APS has several interventions planned for Liberia, including medical training to coincide with arrival of the USS Fort McHenry in November, as well as humanitarian civic assistance (school and clinic renovations), Project Hope health training and outreach and other community relations activities during the visit of the USS Fort McHenry and HSV Swift in March 2008. The APS visit presents an opportunity to improve maritime domain awareness and security/safety at sea in Liberia. Post has requested that APS planners include activities related to marine security and coastal resource management on the APS schedule, and Embassy Econoff is working with the Office of the Oceanographer of the Navy on a specific proposal

for a Fisheries Management meeting in Monrovia during the Fort McHenry visit in March.

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REBUILDING AND REFORMING LIBERIA'S MARITIME INDUSTRY  
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¶12. (U) Liberia's Maritime program has been a source of pride, and controversy. The Liberian ship registry is the second largest in the world and a major source of revenue for the GOL (expected revenues of USD13 million in the 2007-08 budget represent roughly six percent of total government revenue). Liberia now has 2,300 vessels registered under its maritime program. As the only stable and substantial source of revenue during the 1990s, the registry was often squeezed by government officials for revenues to fund the country's conflicts or for personal gain. The program was managed by the International Trust Company (ITC) until 1999 when President Charles Taylor's government awarded the contract to manage the maritime program to the Liberia Shipping and Corporate Registry (LISCR) based in Vienna, Virginia. Revenues from LISCR now flow directly to the Ministry of Finance without passing through the Bureau of Maritime Affairs (BMA).

¶13. (U) Aside from the flow of revenues to the central budget, however, Liberians have benefited relatively little from the maritime sector. Ships that fly Liberia's "flag of convenience" are expected to employ Liberian nationals but the Liberian Seafarers and Port Workers Union of Liberia notes that the provision is rarely enforced. A generation of potential Liberian seafarers has been lost since the collapse of the Merchant Marine Academy in 1992. The Bureau of Maritime Affairs is seeking funding to revive the Liberian Maritime Training Institute (LMTI) in Marshall, Margibi County, in order to properly train and certify more Liberians for employment in the maritime sector. The Global Maritime and Transportation School at the United States Merchant Marine Academy recently completed a feasibility study for the re-establishment of the LMTI. In the meantime, the BMA has moved forward with a small training program for roughly 30 students at offices in Monrovia and potential practical training in collaboration with a school in Ghana.

¶14. (SBU) The Government of Liberia has expressed its desire to

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repeal the 1989 law governing the BMA and reintegrate the BMA into the Ministry of Finance. The nature and scope of the integration is yet to be decided, but a draft audit financed by the European Commission in 2006-07 suggested that the MOF would manage and oversee international maritime program revenue while the BMA would continue to operate with technical and operational autonomy as a maritime industry regulator. BMA Deputy Commissioner Yvonne Clinton said the GOL was awaiting a second audit by the IMO in November 2007 before deciding how to proceed. (Note: President Sirleaf recently fired BMA Commissioner John Morlu for unspecified reasons and later reinstated him to carry on official duties as Commissioner of BMA after reports emerged that the man named to replace Morlu, John Stewart, was implicated in fraud in the United States. End note).

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PORT REFORM - AN AGREEMENT WITHIN REACH?  
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¶15. (SBU) The Monrovia Freeport is the only functioning lifeline for seaborne cargo into and out of Liberia. After years of mismanagement, neglect and corruption, port operations at present are inefficient, port security is insufficient and port infrastructure is inadequate. The GOL and international partners are currently in the process of drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will outline plans for a Build-Operate Transfer (BOT) agreement between the GOL and a private partner for either a container terminal concession or a master concession for the entire Monrovia Freeport. According to initial discussions between the GOL and international donors, the signing of the MOU would trigger the release of up to USD one million of World Bank funds for the immediate implementation of an emergency contingency plan to help ensure continued port operations in the event of a major structural breakdown. The MOU would also specify a timeline

for a final GOL decision on the scope of the BOT, outline external assistance to improve port operations and prepare bid documents, and detail additional donor-funded investment in infrastructure and technical assistance to help maintain a viable, functioning port until more substantial modernization investment occurs under the BOT. An MOU could be concluded as early as November.

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COMMENT  
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¶16. (U) Liberia's maritime sector has the potential to generate substantial revenue and employment but is hampered by a weakened regulatory structure and a complete devastation of marine sector assets. The United States has provided financial and technical assistance to the economically vital port of Monrovia, and has initiated surveys and discussions for providing additional assistance for port security, maritime security and the re-establishment of a Liberian Coast Guard. There is a need (and much potential) to leverage assistance already planned for the maritime sector into other areas of relative neglect, particularly in fisheries, freshwater biodiversity and coastal management.

BOOTH